

Washington, DC-Tuesday, at a meeting with Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, Congressman Harry Teague delivered a letter to the Secretary calling his attention to a recent incident at William Beaumont Army Medical Center (WBAMC). Last week, it was discovered that improper procedures administering insulin shots at WBAMC could have potentially exposed over 2,000 persons to blood-borne diseases. WBAMC provides medical services to many veterans and members of the United States Armed Forces who live in Southern New Mexico. The letter to Secretary Gates comes as a follow up to a request Congressman Harry Teague submitted to Col. Baunchalk, commanding officer at WBAMC regarding this incident and requesting response by this Friday, February 13. Below is the text of the letter from Congressman Harry Teague to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates.

Text of Letter to Secretary Gates:

February 9, 2009

The Honorable Dr. Robert M. Gates

Secretary of Defense

1000 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

I would like to call to your direct attention that William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas recently announced that Army personnel had used an improper procedure to administer insulin shots from August 2007 to January of this year. This has resulted in over 2,000 persons potentially exposed to blood-borne disease, such as Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B and HIV. As the Congressman from Southern New Mexico, many of whose veterans and military personnel are served by William Beaumont, and as a Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I was very concerned about this incident. According to the hospital, 31 percent of those exposed were veterans who received the shots on an inpatient basis. The Veterans' Clinic in El Paso routinely works with William Beaumont to help treat veterans.

Last week I sent the enclosed letter to William Beaumont Commander Colonel James Baunchalk regarding this incident and requested a response by this Friday, February 13. Commander Baunchalk did quickly acknowledge receipt of my inquiry and I await his response. The purpose of my inquiry is to get to the root of what went wrong at William Beaumont so that we can take appropriate steps to prevent this from ever happening again.

As we learn more about what exactly transpired at the hospital, I look forward to working with you to ensure accountability for the errors made at William Beaumont and to ensure high levels of medical care for our veterans and military personnel.

Additionally, I know you are aware that my district includes several military facilities, including White Sands Missile Range and Holloman Air Force Base, that are of the utmost importance to both our national defense and Southern New Mexico communities. I would very much like to have you visit us in Southern New Mexico to see these installations and the great work in which our service members are engaged.

Sincerely,

Harry Teague

Member of Congress

Text of Letter to Col. Baunchalk:

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February 5, 2009

Colonel James Baunchalk

Commander, William Beaumont Army Medical Center

5005 North Piedras Street

El Paso, TX 79920

Dear Colonel Baunchalk:

As a member of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health I write today deeply concerned about reports of incorrect and potentially dangerous procedures used in the administration of insulin injections at William Beaumont Army Medical Center (WBAMC) since August 2007. WBAMC provides medical services to many veterans and members of the United

States Armed Forces who live in Southern New Mexico, which I represent in Congress. Our veterans and armed servicemen and women deserve the highest level of medical care. I find what has happened to be unacceptable and I expect you are taking immediate steps to prevent this from ever occurring again.

In order to establish what went wrong, ensure we protect the health and welfare of those who have been affected, and ensure such mistakes are never again repeated, I ask that you provide me with complete answers to the following questions. Because of the urgency of this situation, I ask you respond in writing no later than February 13, 2009.

1. How did this incorrect procedure come to be practiced at WBAMC, and why were employees able to continue practicing this incorrect procedure without being corrected by a supervising medical professional?
2. Are there procedures in place meant to prevent mistakes such as this from being made? If so, were they followed?
3. How and when was the practice of this procedure discovered?
4. Once it was discovered that a procedure that did not reflect the best medical practices was in use at WBAMC, what steps were taken to correct the problem? Is there protocol for situations like this, and was it followed?
5. How many people received an insulin shot using this incorrect procedure, how many reside in New Mexico, and how many are Veterans?

6. According to WBAMC statements, the incorrect procedure put patients at risk of contracting Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV. What are all the health implications for a patient subjected to this incorrect procedure?
7. Can you positively identify all patients who may have received insulin shots through the incorrect procedure?
8. It is my understanding that this incorrect procedure began in August of 2007. What happens in the event that you do not have up-to-date contact information for patients who may be at risk?
9. If an individual believes he or she may be at risk due to an insulin shot he or she received at WBAMC, what steps should an individual take to determine whether or not they may need medical testing or treatment?
10. I have been informed that roughly 9% of those affected are residents of New Mexico and may live a great distance from WBAMC. What steps are you taking to facilitate testing and further treatment for patients who live far away from WBAMC?
11. What specific steps is WBAMC taking to ensure that this does not happen again?

I would also like to thank you in advance for your responses to my questions. I look forward to working with you to ensure our veterans receive only the highest level of medical care.

Sincerely,

Harry Teague

Member of Congress

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